



QUEUED UP

BY BRYAN REESMAN

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE 2016 Part 1

ALL THINGS MUST PASS (2016)

Colin Hanks chronicles the history of Tower Records, once the behemoth of music retail, from their inception in 1960 to their Stateside shuttering in late 2006. Founder Russ Solomon, his key employees, and music icons like Bruce Springsteen and Dave Grohl weigh in on Tower's lineage and historical importance. The chain's downfall through bad decision making is also explored. Hanks' film is perfect for those nostalgic for the music days of yore as well as young people who want to see what the retail experience and music culture was like before iTunes and streaming



transformed it into a less communal experience. The silver lining? There are still 85 Tower Records locations in Japan; remember that if you happen to be out that way.

MARVEL SAGAS

Marvel Comics continues to dominate the superhero movie arena. While DC snagged two blockbusters this year, they did not serve up the same magic that has kept Marvel at the top of their game. *Captain America: Civil War* and *Deadpool* certainly delivered the goods for fans, and the latter really upended expectations by being a witty, raunchy R-rated slugfest for adults that proved that more risqué costumed fare can sell tickets. On the flipside, however, *X-Men: Apocalypse* was



reportedly aired opposite the iconic miniseries *Roots*, so it underperformed in the ratings. It's too bad; given the chance to grow and evolve, this could have been the best Marvel series of that era.

Keeping in the spirit of that era, Netflix's *Daredevil* series, the first season of which is out now, wisely limits the appearance of its titular hero, likely for budgetary reasons, and focuses on his alter ego, Matt Murdoch, the blind attorney and crusader for justice, and his partner in law Foggy Nelson. Given the special effects overload of Marvel's big screen adventures, this is a refreshing change of pace from all that high-tech flashiness as well as ABC's *Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.* But don't worry—the action sequences, when they arrive, are intense. Marvel Comics has always strived to focus on character first, a sentiment echoed by this gritty series.



weak, preferring posturing and bravado over consistent action and character development. If you love the *X-Men* franchise you'll find some things to like, much of it likely in the bonus features of the release, which includes an excised '80s shopping montage that is colorful and cheeky but would have disrupted the film's dark flow.

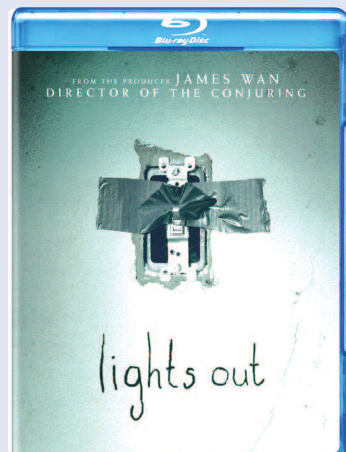
Going old school, the original *Doctor Strange* TV movie from 1978 is a lost gem that is finally getting a DVD release from Shout! Factory after being out of print for eons. Granted, the effects are not nearly as evolved compared with the CG craziness, but for the time it was an ambitious endeavor with pretty good acting, intriguing images, and an often ominous electronic score from classical composer Paul Chihara. This is more likely to appeal to middle aged fans who grew up with the '70s and '80s Marvel TV shows than those dazzled by modern movies—it is fun if flawed and sometimes campy. You could tell the movie was setting up a series that never came. This *Doctor Strange*



DON'T BREATHE and LIGHTS OUT (2016)

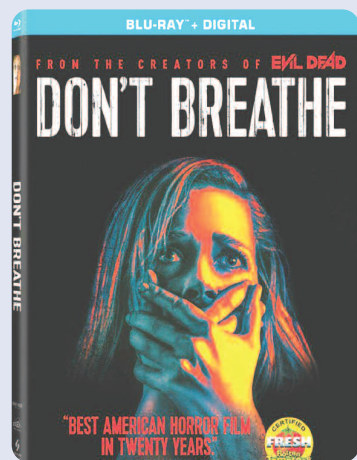
While the horror boom of the previous decade has wound down a bit, there have still been some striking releases scaring moviegoers. This past summer saw the release of *Don't Breathe* and *Lights Out*, both low budget chillers that each grossed around \$150 million globally, which is an impressive feat for the genre.

Don't Breathe is a real-world scenario that makes you feel like it could actually happen. When three young robbers decide to break into the isolated suburban Detroit house of a blind Army veteran who stashes his cash at home, they think the job will be a snap. But the seemingly helpless middle aged man is a highly adept and



skillful soldier with keen senses, and once he realizes that his sanctuary has been invaded, he turns the tables on his hapless predators. His humble home becomes a death trap. Despite an unnecessarily grotesque finale, Fede Alvarez's film strikes home, so to speak, underscoring the survivalist anxiety that permeates this country.

On the flip side, *Lights Out* concerns itself with a supernatural entity that only emerges in the darkness—in the corners of your room, under your bed, in your closet, at night in your home—and when it does, it can inflict serious physical harm and death. The malevolent activity is restricted to a family with an absent patriarch and a mother with mental health issues, and her two kids (one a young adult, the other her 10-year-old half-brother) fend off the vicious creature from preying upon them. It's a striking, original concept that is also short and sweet in execution; minus the closing credits, it runs 75 minutes and does not overstay its welcome.



STAR TREK BEYOND (2016)

After the Enterprise goes to a planet deep in an uncharted nebula to rescue a stranded ship and its crew, they are ambushed by a hostile race with a fleet that swarms with deadly precision. Downed and separated on the planet's surface, Kirk, Spock, and their compatriots must reunite to stop this alien infestation from embarking on an assault against the Federation. While some fans were mixed about the last *Trek*

movie *Into Darkness*, which was essentially a remake of *The Wrath Of Khan*, *Star Trek Beyond* brings back the magic mixture of strong character dynamic and action packed encounters that made the reboot of this new series so charming. It's not quite as good as that, but it still entertains. Co-star and co-writer Simon Pegg gets to show his love for the series, which turned 50 years old in 2016.

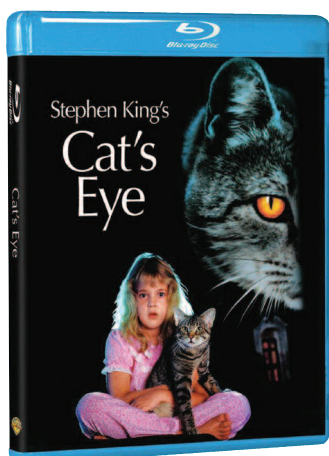


CLASSIC KING

Plenty of Stephen King's novels have been transformed into movies, some good and some not. Warner Bros. recently upgraded a trio of titles to Blu-ray.

Amping up the Dracula mythos, the 1979 TV miniseries version of *Salem's Lot* portrays an emerging vampire infestation in a rural town, and its noteworthy cast includes David Soul (*Starsky & Hutch*), James Mason, and Bonnie Bedelia. While parts of the three-hour epic have not aged well, the spooky set pieces (including a decaying house) are fantastic and some of the scares still make you jump. The eerie scene with a vampire boy floating in a ghostly fog outside of a friend's window is one of the most indelible images of the genre.

One of the few movies written by King, *Cat's Eye* (1985) offers an original trilogy of tales connected by the presence of a frisky, traveling

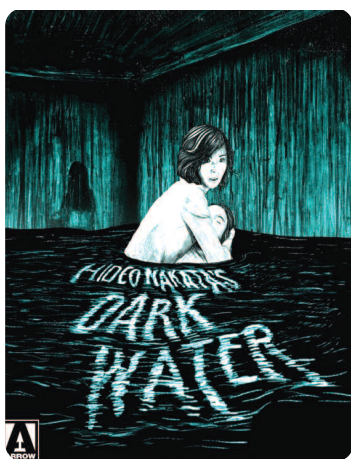


feline who gets caught up in stories involving radical therapy to quit smoking, the unusual revenge of a mob boss against his wife's lover, and a tiny troll that seeks to steal a young girl's breath while she sleeps. While more in the suspense/thriller vein, this is an above average anthology with humorous undercurrents, good acting from the likes of James Woods, Drew Barrymore, and Robert Hays, and great practical effects work.

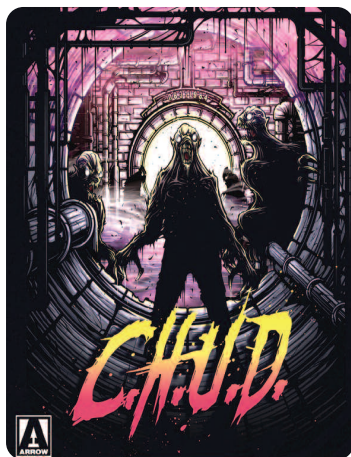
Then we have *It*, the 1990 TV miniseries about adults fending off the homicidal clown Pennywise 30 years after he first emerged in their town and killed one of their young peers. This movie features one of Tim Curry's iconic roles, that of the interdimensional clown killer who exploits the phobias of his victims. Like the other reissued titles here, it also features a solid ensemble onscreen, including Annette O'Toole, John Ritter, Tim Reid, and Seth Green. Do we need a remake? It doesn't matter because we have this.

ARROW ADVENTURES

UK-based Arrow Video, which has US distribution through MVD, has become the Criterion of cult and exploitation movies. This year they have unleashed a wide range of releases, everything from actual cult classics like *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Crimes Of Passion*, *C.H.U.D.*, and *Dark Water* to lesser known fare such as *Slugs*, *Dead-End Drive-In*, and *Microwave Massacre*. Regardless of the title,



Arrow gives their packaging their all: colorful booklets, bountiful bonus features both new and vintage, and excellent transfers. At a time when streaming has taken over, this company delivers value for money and a reason to still collect discs. Even a ridiculous movie like *Blood Bath*, which had no less than four cuts between 1963



and 1966 that reshaped it from a spy thriller to a killer chiller, can be fascinating if looked at from a film student or film buff perspective. That said, the company has way better titles. But whatever your taste, from the silly to the sublime, Arrow passionately probes both.

